Protecting Our Children

Good morning dear friends. Today is the 7th of August, 1998. We are in the New Hamlet, and today we are going to speak French. That's good, isn't it?

You know well that the Buddha is not God; the Buddha is a human being like all of us. He suffered a lot. He practiced, and he overcame his suffering and his difficulties, in order to become a wonderful being who was very calm, very compassionate, very understanding; and he had much happiness. He showed us the way. The Buddha is our teacher, our master, our spiritual father, our brother, and it is absolutely possible to hold the hand of the Buddha while we walk. Every day when I walk I hold the hand of the Buddha. This is something very pleasant to do.

Remember that the Buddha is not God, the Buddha is a human being like all of us. The Buddha had many friends and many teachers. In a previous life the Buddha had been a disciple of a master called *Dipankara*. Dipankara is a Pali word, meaning he or she who lights the lamp. The world needs light, and we need men and women who are able to light up the lamps, to bring into this world the light of freedom, the light of understanding, the light of love. Buddha Dipankara is someone who is able to light up the lamp in order to shine light on the way the world is. In that time the Buddha was a student. He was following higher studies in letters, and his dream was to become a statesman, like the Minister of Internal Affairs, or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or the Prime Minister. That was his dream. In that time the Buddha, Shakyamuni, was called bodhisattva, because he wasn't yet Buddha. The bodhisattva was a student, and his dream was to become a statesman.

All the young people of his time had the same dream: to study, to do research, in order to pass the exams and to be chosen by the king to become a statesman. At that time the parents and friends did everything they could to help students to pass the exams. Every three years there were examinations, and, if you passed the exams well, you could be chosen, to be a statesman. In each province there was a competition organized, and young people like the bodhisattva, were asked to come to the competition. There were thousands of people who were admitted to the competition, but only a hundred could be chosen as statesmen. After they were chosen, all of them were sent to the capital, so the king could make another selection, and this was called the Imperial Competition. The subject of the dissertation was prepared by the king himself. He would ask them ten or fifteen question, to find out if the candidates were able to understand the situation of the country, of the society, and if they had any ways to help the people and the society to develop and be happier.

So the young man offered himself in the competition, but he wasn't chosen. It was with a lot of despair that he left the competition. He had studied a lot, and his dream was to be selected so he could become a statesman, and then he could have a family, become rich and famous, and be able to help his people and his land. But he suffered despair after the competition because he hadn't been chosen, and he went back to his homeland very exhausted. He had to walk for hours and hours across the mountains, through the forests, and over the countryside.

One afternoon he was going past a hill, completely exhausted, and he was hungry. He couldn't go on. Just then he met a hermit, a monk who lived very simply at the foot of a hill. He stopped, and he noticed that the hermit was cooking something in his little pot. He was hungry, he was so tired, he was exhausted, and the worst thing was that despair was ruling his heart. He stopped, and he asked for something to eat, and the hermit said, "Rest a little bit, and when I have finished cooking this soup, I will give you a bowl. But the soup is not cooked, so please lie down. There are the roots of a tree, you can use them as your pillow, and you can rest for the moment, while I finish cooking this soup." The soup which the hermit was making was a millet soup. I don't know if you know of a kind of cereal which is called millet. This was called "golden millet," and it was very good. My mother often made millet soup for me and I like it very much.

The young man lay down, and began to rest. All of a sudden he fell into a deep dream. A very strange dream. In the dream, he saw that he had been chosen in the triennial competition, and he had been first out of a hundred young people who had been chosen. After that he had been sent to the capital in order to take part in the Imperial competition. He did his very best to answer the questions asked by the Emperor. He used all of his intelligence and all the knowledge he had acquired through his reading of many, many volumes of books. Then, he was chosen by the Emperor, and since he was considered the most brilliant of all the young people who had presented themselves at the competition, the Emperor offered him the hand of the Princess. The Princess was very beautiful, and you cannot imagine how happy he was. He was full of hope, full of energy, he had been very fortunate.

He was given a very important post in the cabinet: he was made the Minister of Defense. His land was very small, situated next to a very strong country, and this strong country would often send troops to invade the little country. Therefore, the Emperor made him the Minister of Defense, so he could prepare the land to fight against the invading forces from the neighboring country. He went through many difficulties, many sufferings. There was jealousy, there was despair, there was anger, and his relationship with his wife, the Princess, was not easy. They had arguments nearly every day. They had two children, and the children were very difficult to bring up. So there was a lot of unhappiness, a lot of difficulties in his married life, and also in his social and political life. Then suddenly, he learned that the invading forces of the neighboring country were getting ready to come and invade the country. So he had to call all of his troops together, and send to them to the frontier to resist this military invasion from the next country.

This Minister of Defense was not happy, and therefore his relationships with his wife and his children were not good. He didn't have enough peace and intelligence and clarity in his heart, and so, when he organized the resistance against the enemy, he made a lot of mistakes. The result was that the enemy army was able to invade his country, and take a lot of territory. The news of the defeat was brought to the Emperor, and he was furious with the Minister of Defense. He designated someone else to be in charge of the national defense, and he gave orders for the old Minister of Defense to be beheaded.

In the dream the young man saw himself taken to the execution block, surrounded by soldiers, to be beheaded in a military ceremony. At the moment when he was about to be beheaded, he heard something like the song of a bird, and he woke up. He came out of his dream, and he didn't know where he was. When he looked to the left and the right, he saw that he was at the foot of a hill, and near him was a hermit who was stirring some millet soup in a little pot. It seemed that the dream had not lasted very long, maybe fifteen minutes, but during that time a whole lifetime had passed. I think that the hermit helped this dream to come into the head of the young man, to help him learn something: a whole life had passed in a dream, and it wasn't fifteen minutes at all. When he looked at the hermit, the hermit looked at him with a beautiful smile, and said, "Did you have a good rest? Now the soup is ready. Sit down next to me, I'm going to give you a bowl of this good soup." The young man stood up, and he was no longer hungry. He had seen so much in his dream!

Each life can be a dream, and if you do not know how to live each moment of your life deeply, your life will pass like a dream, very quickly, maybe even more quickly than fifteen minutes. The hermit was there, calm and serene, and he was using a chopstick to stir the millet soup. Looking deeply at the hermit you could see that peace was alive in him. He was really alive, he was really happy. With peace, with solidity and freedom, life is something wonderful, and happiness is possible. The young man was sitting near the hermit, and he asked him questions about the practice. Since he was intelligent, he began to discover that peace in the heart, that liberty and freedom in the heart, are very basic for a happy life. Therefore, he gave up his ambitions to be a statesman. He gave up his dreams. He wanted to learn to live like the hermit, in order to be able to transform his suffering and to bring peace and freedom back into his heart. He decided to become a disciple of the hermit.

This hermit was the Buddha Dipankara, the one who lights the lamp. And afterwards, the young man, when he had practiced through many lifetimes, became a Buddha with the name Shakyamuni. He is our teacher, he is our spiritual father, he is our grandfather, and he is a person with whom we can walk everyday when we do walking meditation. Therefore, if you are a student in the university, think about this. Look deeply into your ambitions, into your plans, to see if it's worth spending all your life and your energy to acquire these objects of your desire. Would it be wiser to look deeply, in order to be able to see that without inner freedom, without solidity, without peace, no happiness will be possible?

To be in touch with someone, a friend, who knows the path of freedom, who knows the path of the practice of solidity and compassion, is something very necessary. The Buddha Dipankara is always there, always near you. If you are attentive, you will recognize him. There is a very

important word in Buddhism: it is *kalyanamitra*. It means a friend who is wise, a friend who has light. This friend can be very close to you, but because you are not mindful enough you have not been able to recognize his presence near you. Buddha Dipankara is there, with his freedom, with his understanding, with his power of shining light. He is the lighter of the lamp for society. You should recognize him and become close to him. You should see him as your closest friend, in order to be able to become what the Buddha Shakyamuni was able to become. This is the theme of my talk: the friend of your life, your lifetime friend, the friend who can uphold you, who can give you light, so that you do not lose your way on paths full of darkness. There are so many young people who are wandering in darkness: alcohol, drugs, and destruction of the body and the mind by an irresponsible way of life. All of this represents the darkness, and too many young people suffer in our society. Therefore we need a great deal of light. But Buddha Dipankara, the person who lights up the lamps in order to bring us light in the world, is always there, near us. We have to look. The moment when you find that spiritual friend is a wonderful moment, and you need to write to me and tell me that you have met the Buddha Dipankara when you meet him or her.

The little bell will be invited, you will stand up and bow to the Sangha, and then you can go out and continue to discuss the Dharma.

(Bell)

My dear friends, I think that we need to set up an alliance between parents and teachers to protect our children. The environment in which our children live does not have enough safety. There are too many negative things in this environment, and the children are exposed to too many dangers. We need to do something to protect the children, day and night, against the aggressions of society. We have organized our society in such a way that we produce many young people who are uprooted from society, from their spiritual traditions, from their families. We have been through times when we have seen the family broken into pieces, and churches which are empty of young people. The spiritual and moral leaders are not able to inspire people, above all the younger generation. There have been times when, and it is true now, when people do not want to listen to the sound of the bell of the church. In the United States, churches no longer ring their bells, and monks no longer wear their habits when they go outside the monastery. Religion has lost its prestige, it’s lost the confidence of people, and so has the family. The family is being broken up. There is no longer any happiness, any harmony in the family. The children born into families like that, growing up in families like that, no longer have confidence in family life; and they no longer have confidence in society or in the church. We have produced generations and generations of young people who can be described as hungry ghosts: hungry for love, for understanding. They can no longer find values to accept and live with.

In my own country we have a tradition of offering food to the hungry ghosts. Once a year, on the full moon day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar—that is the next full moon as far as our calendar here is concerned—each house in our country has an ancestral altar. You have children in the house, but you also have your ancestors in your house. And the practice is to put yourself in contact with your ancestors every day, and also to be in contact with your children every day. This is a very important practice for us in Southeast Asia. When the Catholic missionaries came to Southeast Asia, they told us to abandon this ancestor worship and become Christians. I’m sure that in Christianity there are many things that we can learn and bring into our spiritual lives, but to advise us to abandon our practice of being in touch with our ancestors was something very negative. Every day someone in the family has to dust the altar of the ancestors, change the water in the flower vase, light a stick of incense and come back to oneself before the altar for one or two minutes. It is our daily practice in Vietnam, and every family does this.

The children see their father practicing like this, and they see their mother or their elder sister practicing like this, and they learn how to do the same things: how to dust, how to light incense on the altar. This is a time to be in touch with your roots. If you are uprooted, you cannot be a happy person; therefore you have to keep in touch with your ancestors. They are always there in the family, and in our tradition, everything that happens, every special event in the family, has to be announced to the ancestors. If you are about to send your son to the university, you prepare a little offering to the ancestors, light incense, and tell the ancestors, "A week from now we are going to send this young man to the university." This is not superstition. It is communication with our ancestors, our own source.

The ancestral altar is a symbol. The ancestors are not on the altar, they are in you. But when you look at the altar, you touch the essence of your ancestors in you, and that is the essence of the practice. Even if you are very poor, even if you do not have enough to eat, you will always have an altar for the ancestors in your house, and the altar is always put in the central place in the house. If someone in the family is very sick, your must tell the ancestors, and ask the ancestors to send their support to the one who is sick. Your ancestors are in you, the strong cells in your body, and if you can touch your ancestors, especially those ancestors who lived a long life, perhaps ninety years, you are touching the strong cells in you, and those strong cells can help the cells in you which are not strong, to become strong again.

If you have cancer, you know that there are cells in you which are not working as they should. There is a kind of disorder in your body. Maybe your way of life is not healthy, there is too much stress. Being in touch with your grandfather or your grandmother, who is in you, who was in good health, who was able to overcome their physical and psychological difficulties, you activate the strong elements in yourself in order to be able to get better. So to be able to be in touch with ancestors is a wonderful practice. When you do that you receive a great deal of energy, and understanding and wisdom, and also a great deal of love, which has been handed down to you in the form of seeds. In your store consciousness, your ancestors are all there, with their wisdom, their love. So when you touch the ancestral altar, you touch the ancestors in yourself. If you’re going to marry your daughter to a young man in the neighboring village, you have to tell the ancestors, so there is a regular and continual contact with the ancestors. This is an essential practice as far as I am concerned, and I have proposed it to our Western friends. It is not superstition.

In Plum Village, in the Lower Hamlet, we always used to make an altar for the spirit of the Earth. In all the houses in Vietnam, there is a little altar to the spirit of the Earth. The Earth protects us, the Earth nourishes us, giving us the food that we need and everything else. Therefore, every time we light incense and come back to ourselves before the altar of the Earth spirit, we make a deep aspiration to protect the Earth, because in protecting the Earth, we protect ourselves. This all comes from the spiritual tradition of Southeast Asia.

If you know how to be in touch with your ancestors, then you know how to be in touch with your children and your grandchildren. It is the same thing. You need time to be with your young people, with your children. Not with incense, but with other things: with your breathing, and by walking in the woods with them. I have suggested that we have a little meditation room in each house to be called the breathing room, and there you can renew yourselves. In daily life we are always losing ourselves: we lose our energy, we lose our calm, we lose our honesty. Therefore we need somewhere to be able to go back to ourselves, to be able to renew ourselves. And we call this place the breathing room or the meditation room. In each house of the next century we want to have this kind of room. We have a room for everything: for guests, for children to play in, to sleep, to receive our guests. We have rooms for all these things, but we do not have rooms to renew ourselves, to takes care of our nervous systems. We need a room for our nervous systems, a room where we can make ourselves new, and we can renew the relationships between ourselves and those who live with us. In this room, you can put a little table, with maybe a vase of flowers—or maybe one flower is enough, because this flower symbolizes freshness and beauty and truth. You do not need a statue of the Buddha, but you may need a flower and a few cushions for the different members of your family. Each morning, before leaving the house to go to the office or school, it would be wonderful to sit down together for just one or two minutes. Invite the bell to sound, listen deeply, practice deep listening to the sound of the bell. Touch the depth of your being, touch your spiritual ancestors, and your blood ancestors, and breathe mindfully in and out. This is a wonderful way to begin our day.

Before we have to leave each other, we may say, "Have a good day" to the other person, but this is just a wish. Rather than just wishing that the day will be good, we can make the day good. We can begin our day in such a way that it will be a good day. Sitting on a cushion with your husband or your wife, and with your children, to listen to the bell three times, to breathe deeply at the same time, is a beautiful practice, and it’s very easy to do. You will see harmony and unity in the family, and the child who is there will also feel something. This kind of thing will nourish the children, and throughout their lives they will be able to use these practices as a refuge.

Before going to bed, we can do the same thing. Instead of praying, we can practice a little meditation, just for one minute, before wishing "goodnight" to our children. As parents you can sit with your children for one or two minutes. You can say, "Children, it’s time to go into the breathing room. Let’s sit down and listen to the bell." You turn off the television and go with the children into this little room, which represents peace and calm, and the spirituality of the house. We need a source of spirituality in our houses, and this room represents our spiritual traditions. Therefore we go to this room to sit down peacefully. We go to that room with walking meditation, taking the hand of a child. It is a way of expressing your love, to take the hand of your child, and to go to the breathing room with peace and solidity, and also to give your child peace and happiness. Stay with your child a minute, and listen to the bell. The bell can be invited by the child, and after that the child will go to bed. You will continue what you have to do in the family, and when the time comes for you to go to bed, you will do the same with your husband or wife. These are very simple things to do, but they are very important. It’s rather like having an ancestral altar.

We all have ancestors, spiritual and blood ancestors, and we know that someone who is cut off from their roots cannot be happy. Thus, the practice is to be able to put down our roots, re-root ourselves. It's very important to be able to do this. The child needs to go back to his or her roots; how can they do that? Only with you. You need to help the child to go back to his or her roots, organizing your daily family life in such a way that the child can practice rooting himself or herself every day.

Without roots we become hungry ghosts. Look around your. There are so many young people who are completely uprooted from their cultures, their families, and their spiritual traditions. They have nothing to do with them. They are looking for something true and beautiful and good, but they are unable to find these things. In the church they cannot find them, in the family they cannot find them, in society they cannot find them, and they despair. In their anguish, they feel that they feel they cannot go on. They cannot bear this terrible emptiness, since they can find nothing beautiful in the world, nothing true, nothing good. Therefore they despair, and despair is the most terrible poison. Young people have come to this point, this sickness of despair, and therefore they use drugs, or they use music, or they use alcohol, and destroy themselves physically, and mentally.

The government has had to use strong means to stop the importation of drugs, even using the army. They use airplanes and helicopters to mount an attack on those who bring in drugs. But the only way is to see the cause of people wanting to take drugs, which is because of a lack. People feel the need for something to believe in: truth, goodness, beauty, without which life has no meaning. That is why the young people have suffered so much, and many of them have become hungry ghosts. I have met many young people who are hungry ghosts, or wandering spirits. They come to our practice center. You only have to look at them for one or two minutes and you will be able to identify them as hungry ghosts. The way they walk, the way they sit, the way they stand up, proves that they are hungry ghosts. They are hungry for understanding, hungry for love, and wherever they go they are not understood by the church, their families or society.

In my own country, on full moon day of the seventh month, we offer food for the hungry spirits. We can do this in France also, but in a different way. As far as we believe, a hungry ghost has a huge belly, and an esophagus as thin as a needle. We call them *pretas* in Sanskrit. Even if you have food to offer to these hungry ghosts, it is impossible for them to swallow it, because their throats are too small. They cannot swallow, therefore in the ceremony we have to use a mantra which is able to make their throats the usual size, so that they are able to receive food. We make the offering in the garden, in front of the house, because only the ancestors can eat at the ancestral altar, and there isn't enough room there for the hungry ghosts. Therefore a table is set up in the garden in front of the house, and on that table we offer food and drink for the hungry ghosts. And we recite mantras and *dharani*, magic formulas to help hungry ghosts have throats of a normal size, so that they are able to receive food and drink. There are many chants also, and readings from the sutras to help the hungry ghosts to have a deeper understanding of the practice, so that they can transform themselves. This is the living practice in Vietnam.

Now if we look around us we will see that the hungry ghosts are always there, and every day we create more hundreds of thousands of hungry ghosts. The way in which we organize our society produces hundreds of thousands of hungry ghosts every day. I have tried a great deal to help these young people, but it is very difficult, because there is so much suspicion in them. They do not believe us easily. Even if you have something to offer them, it is difficult for them to accept it, because of their suspicion and doubt. We need to be very patient to gain their trust. Before we gain their trust, we cannot do anything to help them. They need understanding, they need love. But even if you have understanding and love, it is difficult to give it to them, because they are suspicious of everything, and they doubt everything. Therefore you need a lot of patience in order to help them. You need to learn how to embrace them with your tolerance, and above all with your patience. One day a little root may emerge, and you'll have hope; your task is to help that person to have roots, to put down their roots again, and you'll do your best to send that person back to their family, their society, and their church.

Understanding is essential. We need to understand why the situation in the family has become what it is; we have to understand why that situation in the church has become what it is. We have to understand why the situation in the society has become what it is. And once we understand that, we can forgive, and we will be able to have enough energy to go back and to do something to renew the institution called family, church or society. The family needs to be restructured. With the practice and mindfulness, you can restructure your family, and you can restructure your church, your society. We need to truly bring about the energy of understanding and compassion in the family, in order to be able to reclaim the young people who have left us. When we practice mindfulness, we can look deeply and try to restructure our families. We act in such a way that understanding and harmony and being in touch are possible every day. Practice in such a way that you can be in touch with your ancestors every day. Practice in such a way that the relationship between you and your children is re-established, and communication is restored.

It is necessary to practice listening deeply, to practice compassionate listening. And practicing loving speech is also necessary. All these things are taught in practice centers. Learn how to listen, to your ancestors, to your children, and your partner. Without doing this, you cannot re-establish communication, and without communication will be lost.

Deep listening means compassionate listening. It is something we have to train ourselves in straight away, because many of us have lost the capacity to listen. There's too much pain and too much irritation in us, and we are not able to listen with patience and compassion. In each of us there is some suffering, there is despair, there is anger and irritation. There are people who are like bombs, ready to explode at any moment, and we are afraid to go near them, we are afraid to talk to them. The slightest mistake will make them explode. When we try to avoid such a person, he thinks we have given up on him or her, he thinks everyone hates him or her. Therefore, at all costs, we should learn how to communicate, and the practice of listening deeply is absolutely necessary.

In Buddhism there is someone called *Avalokiteshvara*. He or she is someone who has wonderful ability to listen with compassion, knowing that the other person suffers so much. We know that they need to express themselves, but nobody in the house dares to listen, because everyone else has their own suffering. When listening to the other person with all your pain, it is possible that you will what you hear will water the seeds of suffering in you, and when those seeds are watered you will have no more patience or ability to listen deeply. Compassionate listening has one aim only, and that is to relieve the suffering of the other person. You need to breathe mindfully in order to nourish your intention to listen. I have no other motivation for listening other than to give the person the opportunity to express themselves. We need to train for a long time in order to be able to do this. Even if the other person accuses you, even if the other person is full of wrong perceptions, even if the other person accuses you quite unjustly, is always reproaching you, you keep your compassion alive, and you are able to stay by them, silently, calmly. Your business is to listen, even if there is no truth, no justice in what they are saying. If you can listen for an hour like that it is already a wonderful help to the other person. You are the best kind of psychotherapist, because you have the capacity to listen with compassion, just to listen. You don't have to say anything. Even if the other person says very foolish things, if all of his perceptions are wrong, even if he or she accuses you, you always follow your breath and keep calm, because you are playing the role of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, listening in order to relieve the suffering. This is something that anyone can do.

If you practice mindful breathing sitting meditation, walking meditation for a week, you will be able to acquire the capacity to listen deeply to the other person. And with the practice of deep listening goes the practice of loving speech, a kind of speech which is characterized by calmness. You have the right to say everything which is in your heart. You do not need to hide things. You don't need to hide anything. You have the right, even the duty, to tell everything that is in your heart, but you have to say it in a loving way, a calm way. This may not be easy. It takes a lot of concentration.

At first you may have a very strong intention to use only calm words, but when you begin to speak you begin to touch the blocks of suffering within yourself, and you lose yourself. There are vibrations in your voice. The pain begins to manifest itself in your words. You suffer, you become irritable, and your words lose their capacity to communicate. The energy of your pain starts to rise up in you until you can no longer speak with loving speech. In such a case you shouldn't continue. You should say, "My dear one, I do not feel quite right. I promise that we can continue another day." And at that point you retire. You should not try too much. You should stop as soon as you see that you are no longer calm. You have your limits, and you know your limits. Therefore, you have to train more and more, until you can stay for half an hour or an hour, and practice loving speech. You have to communicate to the other in such a way that they can accept what you are saying. Tell them the truth. Tell them what has made you suffer. Do not blame or make any accusations. Just help the other to see what is in your heart: "Darling, I have suffered, and this is my suffering. I just wanted you to know what is happening in me, because I need your help. Without you I cannot do it." At this moment there is a transformation, a healing, and you have to commit yourself in this way so that the other person can sit down and listen to you.

One of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, the Fourth Mindfulness Training, is about the practice of deep listening and loving speech. You know that without practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing, without being able to embrace your pain while breathing deeply, we cannot do this deep

listening. Therefore, it all a practice which you have to apply in your daily lives. When you are in a mindfulness retreat, you must make all efforts to learn and to make a firm beginning in the practice. Every day of practice will bring you more strength, and you will learn the art of living mindfully. You will learn how to walk, how to sit, how to breathe, how to listen, and how to use calm and loving speech. When you go back home you have to arrange things in such a way that your practice will continue. If you have a partner who can practice with you, you are very lucky. If you have a child who is ready to practice with you, that is very good. But if you are alone, you can practice in such a way that others can see you are now a more pleasant person, more fresh, more loving. We have confidence in the practice because the practice can modify everything. And the practice begins with you, yourself, and then it will increase and go to others and touch those who live with you. You don't have to wait for the other to change. You should begin to change yourself, in your own way, with your own words, by your listening, by your walking, by your way of eating and your way of living your daily life. Then the peace, happiness and calm in you will be noticed by others. In this way you have begun to change the situation, through change in yourself, before you are able to change what is outside of yourself.

(Bell)

We all have a tendency to blame the other person. If things are not going well, we say that it's his fault, or her fault. If something's going wrong, it must be him, or it must be her—it's not me! The Buddha said, "This is because that is; this is not, because that is not. This is like this, because that is like that." He used very simple words. You want to change the other person, whether it happens to be your child or your spouse, but you don't think about changing yourself. First of all the change has to take place in you—the way you listen, the way you speak, the way you walk, the way you sit down, the way you work—you can change it all, you can better it all, in order to help others to change.

(Bell)

The Buddha has taught us six ways of going beyond, of going over to the shore of non-suffering. In order to be able to cross the river of our difficulties and arrive at the other side, the shore of well being. This teaching is called the teaching of the Six *Paramitas,* the six ways of going across, of going over. If you're angry, you're on this side of the river, but you shouldn't stay on this side of the river. You should do something to get to the other side, the side of well being. This is something we can do in our daily lives. Often we find ourselves in a difficult position, which has been brought about by our own psyche; we can do something in order to get out of this position. The heart of the practice is mindfulness. We all know that mindfulness is an energy which allows us to be there in the present moment, to become really present, to become truly and totally alive. I'm going to draw something. This is a circle, with this character, which means mindfulness. The Chinese word for mindfulness is written like this: the top half means now, and underneath we have the character which means mind. Your mind comes back to the present moment, that is what is meant by mindfulness. So breathing in, or taking a step, you're able to bring your body and your mind back together, and suddenly you are really there in the here and the now. This state of being is called the oneness of body and mind. It's a very simple practice, but it's very efficient and it's very efficacious. Only one breathing in or breathing out will bring you back to the present moment, and there you will be able to touch life deeply.

I'm drawing a petal, because the Six Paramitas, the six crossings-over, are thought of as a flower. The first practice is called the practice of giving. You have to know how to give, and if you are able to give, you will go beyond suffering, and you will re-establish well being in yourself. What do you have to give? Do you need money in order to be able to give? No. You always have something to give, and I want to tell you that the most precious thing that you can give is your presence. You can always offer your presence to someone as a gift. When you love someone, what can you give them, what can you do, to have something to give them? You can give your presence, because without being present you cannot have love. To love means to be there, body and mind united. This is something you can do. Breathing mindfully, you come back to yourself, and you can look at the other person and say, "Darling, I am here for you." If you are not there, how can you love? We are all so busy, and our presence for the person we love is something very rare.

I know a child of eleven years old, and his father asked him, "Tomorrow is your birthday. Can I buy something for you?" The young man was not interested. His father was extremely rich, and he could have bought anything for his son, but the child didn't need that kind of thing. He had so many toys already. He only needed one thing: his father's presence. When you are rich, you have to use your time and energy to stay rich. You don't have enough time for being with the ones you love. So if a father is intelligent, he will see that the most beautiful present he can give to his child is his own presence. Often we are there physically, but we are not there spiritually. We are lost in the past, in the future, and in our plans. We are not really there. A child is disappointed, a wife is disappointed, a husband is disappointed. You are not really there. So the child can come and touch your shoulder, and he can say, "Is someone home?" You'll come out of your dream, out of your prison, out of the past and the future, and come back to yourself. If the child doesn't do that you'll have to do it for yourself. You have to take some steps into mindfulness, take some breaths in mindfulness, make yourself present, look at your child, and say: "Darling, I am here for you now." You open your arms, and that is the most precious gift you can give to the one you love: your own presence. You don't need money to do this.

When you are there, something else is there too. As I said yesterday, when you are really there, life is there too. Life with all its wonders: the blue sky, the luxurious vegetation, the setting sun, the full moon, the wonderful face of the one you love, all these things are available to you. If you are not there, you will lose it all, these things do not mean anything. But when you are there, the other thing is there too, and you are practicing the recognition of what is beautiful and wonderful in your life. When you are there, the person you love is there too. So you can open your eyes, smile, and make a declaration: "Darling, I know you are there, and it makes me very happy." To be loved is to be recognized as being, as existing, and you should confirm your mindfulness of the other person's existence. "Darling you are there, alive, and that is something very precious as far as I am concerned. I am very happy because of it." With the energy of mindfulness you embrace the one you love, and when someone is surrounded by this wonderful energy, they will open like a flower. That person may be your child, may be your daughter, your son, that person may be your partner. You can have the luxury of the practice, and with one conscious breath, some mindful breathings, some mindful steps, you can bring about your own presence, and make it a present for the one you love.

In tantric Buddhism we practice reciting *dharanis*, and we say that by reciting these magic formulae we change the situation. But now we can recite mantras in French or English. With right mindfulness present in you, you become really there, really alive. You have only to open your mouth and say the words: "Darling, I am here for you. I am really here for you". That is the mantra. The second one: "Darling, I know you are there, and it makes me very happy," is another mantra, something which can make the other person happy straight away, instantly. The essence of the practice is mindfulness, and with mindfulness you are really there, you are there in the situation to be able to recognize the presence of the other person. To be loved is to be recognized as existing.

Remember, there are moments when you are driving your car, and he or she is sitting next to you. You are thinking about everything, but you don't think about the person sitting next to you—you think that you know everything about that person. You can even be singing a song, and thinking about your future and your plans, and you are quite unaware of the person who is sitting next to you. There is no mindfulness. You are not practicing love. Love is the energy of mindfulness which surrounds and embraces the object of your love.

(Bell)

These two mantras can be practiced in French, English, German or Italian. I can assure you that it will work, and lead to the energy of mindfulness. If the energy of mindfulness is in you, the mantras will be very effective. You will see straight away the effect of this practice in the present moment. You should nourish the person you love with mindfulness and with your real presence. You should nourish yourself with this mindfulness, this energy of mindfulness. You should be there for yourself; you should be there for the person you love. You know what to do in order to be there for yourself and for the other.

When the other suffers, which he or she will do from time to time, if you are really there you will notice that there is suffering there, and with the same method you light up the lamp of mindfulness in yourself, you go to him or her, and you recite the third mantra: "Dear one, I know you are suffering, and that is why I am here for you." When you suffer, and the person you love most of all is not aware of it, you suffer even more. But if the person you love is there and is aware that you are suffering, your suffering is already relieved. You suffer much less, because your loved one knows that you are suffering. Before you've actually done anything to help the other, your presence alone has transformed the situation. Your presence is healing and transforming. This is something not difficult to do. Having practiced somewhat, you can change the atmosphere in the family and you can improve the quality of relationship between you and your loved ones.

I have a fourth mantra which is a little difficult to practice, but we need to be able to train to do it. It's an important mantra. You use it when you are suffering yourself, and you think that the other person is the reason for your suffering, the person that you love most of all. It's difficult. If

somebody else had said that, had done that, you would have suffered much less; but because that person, the person you love the most, said that or did that, you suffer a hundred times more. You want to close yourself in your room in order to cry on your own, and if that person comes towards you, you prefer that he or she not touch you: "Leave me alone." That is your natural tendency. When you suffer, you want to be alone. You feel that the other person is the cause of your suffering, and you do not want to be helped by him or her. You want to show that you don't need him or her. This is very childish, but we all do this. When we think that the other person is the reason for our suffering, we want to show them that we can be all alone, that we don't need them. The fourth mantra is something which will help you.

There is a story, a tragedy, which everyone in my country knows about. The story of a man who went to war and left his wife at home, pregnant. When they were separated, they cried a lot, but, fortunately, two years later he came back home. By that time the little boy had been born. His wife and his little boy came to the gate of the village to meet the veteran. He wept in their arms, and then he said to his wife, "Go to the market and buy some things to be able to prepare an offering to put on the ancestral altar, and to announce to the ancestors that the soldier has returned." The ancestors always need to be told the good news.

When his wife was at the market, the husband tried to persuade the child to call him Daddy. "No, mister, you are not my Daddy. My Daddy is someone else. He comes every night, and my Mommy talks a long time to him, many times, and she cries a lot. Each time she sits down, he sits down too. Each time she lies down, he lies down too." The child spoke all these terrible things, and the happiness of the husband disappeared completely. He became a block of ice. When his young wife came home, he did not look at her. His suffering was so great, it came right up to his heart. There was nothing he could do. After he had offered incense to the ancestors, he touched the earth four times, as we do in Vietnam, and he addressed his prayer to the ancestors. Then he rolled up the mat on which he had touched the earth, so that his wife would not be able to touch the earth in front of the ancestors. He thought that his wife was unfaithful to him, and therefore was not worthy to present herself before the ancestors. His wife was still very young, she didn't understand at all why her husband's attitude had changed so drastically after she came back from the market. She suffered too much. She kept all this suffering within her own heart, because she was proud. He was proud. He suffered so much, but his pride was too great to allow him to share his suffering with his wife.

After having told the ancestors the good news that he had returned home, he went out into the village, and he spent all his time in the bar, drinking alcohol. When people suffer a lot, if they do not know how to practice, they use alcohol to drown their suffering. Usually, after an offering like this, the whole family needs to come together before the altar to celebrate the good news; but he went out into the village, and he only came back at two o'clock in the morning. He did this for three or four days, and his wife couldn't bear it any longer. She threw herself into the river and drowned herself.

After hearing the news the young husband came back home to take care of his child. That night, he lit up the kerosene lamp in the house, and the little boy pointed to the shadow of his father, and he said, "Mister, that's my father. He comes every night, and Mommy speaks to him every night, and she cries a lot. And every time she sits down, he sits down too." The child's words! Now the husband began to understand. The father the child talked about was just the shadow thrown onto the wall. His wife had spoken to a shadow every night: "My dear husband, you've been away so long. How can I, all alone, take care of our little boy?" and then she would cry. And of course, every time she sat down, the shadow sat down too. Wrong perception had now been removed, but it was too late. The young lady was already dead, and there was no way to bring her back to life.

If there had been ho pride, the young man could have come to his wife and said, "While you were out in the market, our little boy said that someone comes to visit you every night. I don't understand. I'm suffering so much because of this. You have to explain it to me." If he had done this, his young wife would have had an opportunity to explain, and both of them would not have had to undergo the tragedy which happened. But he didn't do that. His wife too had suffered greatly, but the pride she had stopped her going to her husband and saying: "Darling, why are you acting like this? Why are you behaving like this? Since I came back from the market you haven't looked at me, you haven't spoken to me. Have I done something so terrible, to be treated like this?" If his wife had said something like that, then her husband would have been able to explain what had happened, and together they would have not had to go through this tragedy.

All of us, we can make the same mistake in our daily lives, when we suffer, and we think that the other person is the cause of our suffering, we want to be alone, we want to show: "I don't need you any more. I can live without you." This is a very childish attitude, but it always remains in us. So the fourth mantra is to help you to go across the river and reach the other shore. You need mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindfulness in all your activities; and then with calm words you go to the other and you say, "Darling, I am suffering so much. You have to help me; you have to explain: why did you do that? Why did you say that? Without you I cannot get out of this difficulty I'm in." If you have the ability to say such a thing is such a way, then the person you love will have the chance to explain to you, and if there is a wrong perception, you will be able to free yourself from that wrong perception.

In daily life, there are so many wrong perceptions, and sometimes we keep a wrong perception for a very long time. For ten years, twenty years, a wrong perception can destroy our relationship. Therefore, I do not want my friends to make the same mistake as Mr. Truong. Next time you are suffering and you think that the suffering is caused by the person that you love most in the world, remember the fourth mantra. "Darling, I'm suffering so much. I don't understand why you, the person that I love most in the world, could have said something like this, could have done something like this to me. Help me. Explain why you did that." This will bring a lot of mindfulness energy to the other, and the other will say something to help you get out of your difficult situation.

The gift of giving…giving is a way of going across the river of suffering, and establishing yourself on the shore of well being. The first gift you give is your presence, your mindfulness of what is in the present moment. This energy of mindfulness will relieve the suffering, and therefore it is a present you can give to the one you love. The Buddha said when you are angry and you have done everything you can to put an end to your anger, but you have not yet managed to do that, practice giving. Find something and offer it to the person who has caused your suffering, caused your anger, and the Buddha guarantees that after giving your anger will be transformed. I suggest that you do not wait until you are angry to prepare the gift you will be giving. Prepare the gift beforehand. Maybe that person is your father, is your husband, your wife, your partner. Sometimes you are angry with him or her; therefore, prepare yourself in advance, before it happens again, and have a present ready, or kind words written, and keep the present in your house. When you feel angry and you have done everything you can to get over your anger but it doesn't work, you bring out your present, you go to the Post Office, and you send it to him or her. You don't have to wait. Once you have sent the present in the post, you will already feel that your anger has been transformed. If you are angry with someone, give him or her something. That is what the Buddha said. Giving is a way, a wonderful way, to come to the other shore.

Another petal is called mindfulness, mindfulness training. This is the practice of protection. The five Mindfulness Trainings are to protect you and your loved ones. If you live according to the insight of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you will be able to put yourself in a safe place. If you love someone, you should practice the mindfulness trainings. It's a kind of gift. When love is new, you want the person you love to be safe. Therefore, you can sign up with an insurance company, you think only in monetary terms. We can protect our selves and the people we love with money, but there are other ways to protect oneself. According to the Buddha, to protect oneself with mindfulness is the surest way to protect yourself. There are countries where, when we say goodbye to somebody, we say, "Take care." Either at the beginning of a journey, or just at the beginning of a day, we say: "Take good care." In Vietnam, and in China, we say *than trong*. "Take care." It expresses love. If you love someone, look after yourself. Looking after yourself, you look after the one you love. It's very clear.

You love your child, but you cannot be with your child 24hrs a day, your child has to go to school. Your child has to be in touch with others in the society, so he is at risk. How can you make your child secure, safe? When something happens to you, it happens to your child; when something happens to your child, it happens to you. You and your child inter-are. We inter-are. Therefore, to protect oneself is to protect the other, and helping the other to protect themselves is to protect yourself. That is exactly what we are learning here in the Five Mindfulness Trainings. If you study deeply the nature of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you will see that they are realistic ways to protect you, to protect your loved ones, and to protect your society. For example, the Fourth Mindfulness Training, which concerns the art of deep listening and loving speech. If you train yourself to listen deeply, to speak lovingly, you will protect yourself and you will protect other members of your family. There are so many families which are broken because people cannot communicate between themselves within the family. We are not capable of listening, of speaking calmly, and we provoke dangerous situations in our families. Separation is a dangerous situation. Hate is a dangerous situation. And they come from us, ourselves. It's not like a car accident, which can happen because of somebody else's driving. The seed of anger is always there in us, and our lack of mindfulness can always put our anger into motion. So to practice mindful speech and listening will protect you and the others.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training concerns consumption, the practice of mindful consumption. We know that we can ingest elements that bring war

and disorder into our body. We can ingest elements that will destroy our minds. When a child is exposed to television programs which are not healthy, this is dangerous consumption. When you read a book, when you look at television, you are consuming. When you listen to a conversation which contains a lot of poisons and despair, you are consuming these things. We are prey to so many toxins in our daily lives. Therefore, the Fifth Mindfulness Training is to protect us and our loved ones by mindful consumption. Before eating something, we have to look deeply to see whether this food is going to destroy or nourish us. The same is true for spiritual nourishment, magazines, television programs, conversations—all these things can be toxic. We have to practice mindfulness in order to understand, in order to identify the products which we consume. Can they help us to heal? We should avoid all kinds of products which will ruin us. And so we come together as a family, as a Sangha, and we make laws concerning consumption. If we are depressed, it is because we have consumed without mindfulness, we have allowed toxins and poisons to come into us. By our consumption, we have listened, we have looked, we have thought, we have allowed these toxic elements to come into us. To consume mindfully is a way to protect ourselves, which is very effective and absolutely necessary. If you are able to apply this practice in your family, there will be perfect security for your family. If you can live with these protections, that is the most beautiful gift you can give to your society, and to your family. Therefore the practice of mindful consumption is a form of gift.

So many families have been broken by sexual misconduct. We are talking about the Third Mindfulness Training. Sex without love and a real long-term commitment is empty sex, and it’s dangerous. We think that the emptiness in us will dissolve if we have a sexual relationship with another person. We feel a vacuum, an emptiness within ourselves, and we cannot bear this: "I don’t want to undergo this." We feel too lonely, and we think that our loneliness will dissolve when we have sexual relations with another person. When two bodies come together in a sexual way, there must be mutual understanding, there must be deep and perfect communication, so that the sexual act is not empty. We live in a time when young people practice empty sex, and this is very dangerous. At thirteen or fourteen years old, when they don’t know anything about real love, they have sex, which is something very destructive. We have live in such a way, and tell our children, that it is very dangerous to have empty sex, because empty sex will stop you being able to experience real love in the future. Real love only comes from deeply understanding each other. There has to be perfect communication, there has to be deep sharing, as far as our ideals in life are concerned.

We have be in agreement about how we will get out of our difficulties together, we have to know how to be partners in the family and in the society, before we have sexual relations. Because of empty sex and violence, young people today can destroy everything. We have to give them a good example. We have to live in a way that shows young people the way, and therefore the Third Mindfulness Training is about protection of the family, of children, from sexual abuse. Our society has been damaged by this sexual misconduct. As a Sangha, we should get together and practice looking deeply to find ways to protect ourselves and to protect our families against this practice of empty sex, which is truly destructive. We will continue this teaching on Sunday in Vietnamese. First of all giving, and then the practice of Mindfulness Trainings. We are going to talk about the practice of inclusiveness.

As far as I am concerned, the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings is the only way to help us get out of our difficult situation in our society today. I am sure that if everyone could go back to their spiritual source, and practice looking deeply, they would discover the equivalent of the Five Mindfulness Trainings in their own traditions. They are not things imposed on us by someone else. They are the result of the deep insight that we have discovered when we live in mindfulness. You know what is happening. You know about the destruction, the pain the suffering which reigns in the world, and when you look deeply at the world, you see that if we have this kind of suffering, it is because we have done something, or we have failed to do something. Therefore, we come to a kind of wisdom, and that wisdom is that we should live mindfully in order to restructure our own lives, our family life and our social life. If you ask me what we can do to get out of this difficult situation, I would say quite simply, live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Five Mindfulness Trainings give a very concrete way to live our daily lives mindfully. Mindfulness manifests concretely in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, which can be seen as the way of liberation, the path of emancipation.

(Three Bells)

End of Dharma talk.